



Patchwork Quilt from Clothing Scraps

Written By: Wendy Tremayne



TOOLS:

- [Cutting mat \(1\)](#)
[self-healing.](#)
- [Rotary cutter \(1\)](#)
- [Ruler \(1\)](#)
- [Scissors \(1\)](#)
- [Sewing machine \(1\)](#)



PARTS:

- [Fabric \(1\)](#)
[Backing fabric; old sheets are ideal.](#)
- [Batting \(1\)](#)
[such as an old flannel sheet.](#)
- [Thread \(1\)](#)
- [safety pins \(1\)](#)

SUMMARY

Quilt design and photography by [Heather Cameron.](#)

Heather Cameron apologizes. Her spectacular patchwork quilt was not composed entirely from objects in roadside dumpsters — she supplemented with secondhand clothing from Swap-O-Rama-Rama, a semiannual event she produces in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she lives.

A seasoned reuse artist, Cameron often challenges her own high standards. Her intention for this project was not just to re-create a historical work in modern form; she wanted to

experience the process of the patchwork quilters who inspired her.

Cameron was inspired by the Japanese quilting method yosegire, which means “to sew together.” As a patchwork style, yosegire originated in the 16th century, but the premise of using scrap-made garments of seamed-together bits dates back long before that. Legend has it that the Buddha, who lived in the 6th century B.C., instructed his followers to wear patchwork garments patterned like the rice fields of India, assembled from discarded rags. The idea resonates with Buddhist teachings about the interconnectedness of all beings.

Cameron compares the history of the yosegire to the work of the women of Gee’s Bend, Ala. Living below poverty level in an isolated African-American hamlet, these women craft scraps into ornate, abstract quilts. Necessity opens a portal from which unbounded and organic, fresh designs emerge.

“I’m drawn to the abject, the discarded, and the idea of restoration and redemption,” Cameron says. “The Buddhist concept of yosegire exemplifies making something out of nothing, while the quilters of Gee’s Bend work with what’s too worn to be used anymore.”

Cameron decided to take advantage of Vancouver’s 2007 garbage strike and the growing piles of trash that lined her street. She gathered whatever clothing crossed her path, opting for those that were, for the upper classes, the least appealing — polyester stretch pants, an XL black lace negligee, and a chef’s apron — as textiles that symbolize a range of labor and class. She also used pieces from her Swap-O-Rama-Rama.

After laundering and cutting out stains, Cameron innovated ways to combine different textiles such as knits and weaves. The project became a field of color and texture. One might liken it to the Buddha’s vision of the fields of India, though Cameron, colored by the culture of her modern time, observes that her field resembles licorice allsorts candy.

Cameron believes in the living thread she participates in, one of nondifferentiation of the self and other, of opening one’s consciousness to all the world. As the Sufi sage Hazrat Inayat Khan aptly said, “Liking comes from knowledge and dislike from ignorance.”

Step 1 — Find and cut clothes.



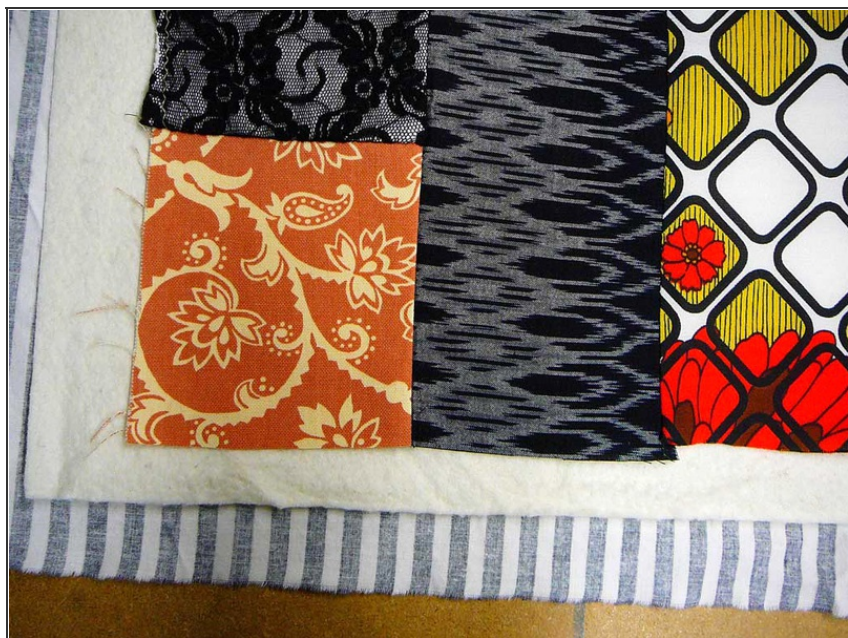
- Trim unusable areas, but keep the interesting elements such as buttons or pockets. Use the rotary cutter, mat, and acrylic ruler to cut garments into even strips. For a quick tutorial, go [here](#).

Step 2 — Sew strips together.



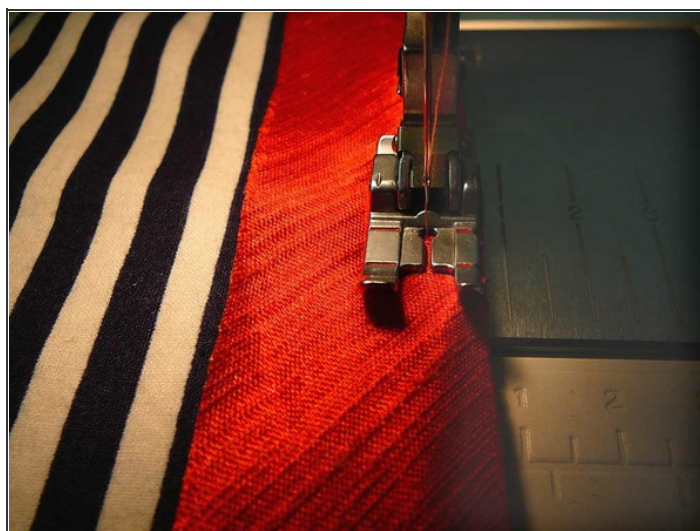
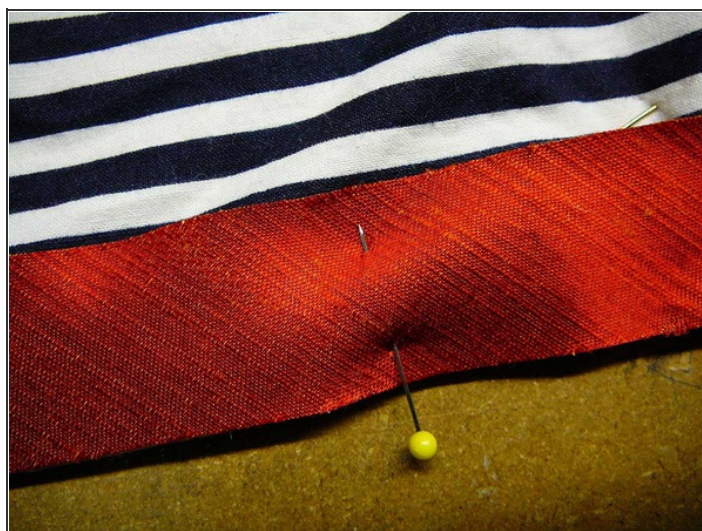
- For the nucleus of the quilt, randomly grab a handful of strips, join them end to end with a 1/4" seam, then press the fabric. For an angled seam, lay 2 strips face up, overlap the ends, and use the rotary cutter to cut both layers at once. This makes for accurate joins. Varying your seam angles makes for a lively patchwork. Repeat until you've sewn strips the length of your quilt. When you have multiple full-length strips, begin sewing them together.

Step 3 — Assemble the quilt.



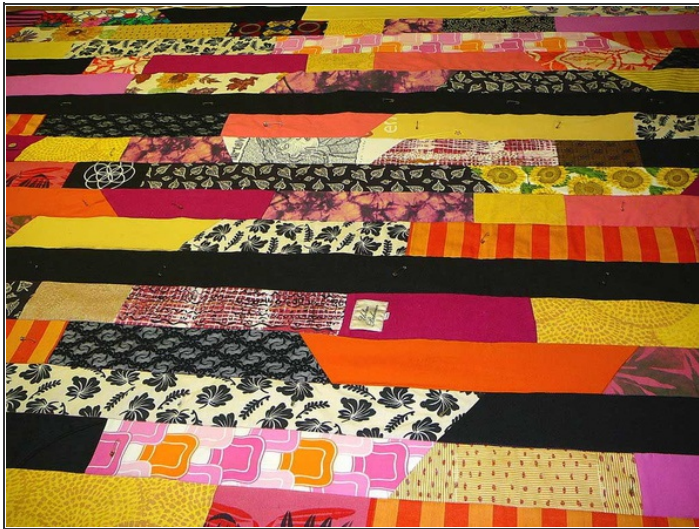
- Place the pieces in this order, making a “sandwich”: backing layer facedown, batting layer, then top layer face up. Make sure all layers lie smooth, then secure them in place with safety pins.

Step 4 — Sew the quilt.



- “Stitch in the ditch” sewing is recommended for this project — stitches straight down the seams of the patchwork. Keep your presser foot aligned right on top of the seam, and try to have the needle enter the fabric on the low side of the seam. Trim the edges straight. Stitch or zigzag around the edge of the quilt. For the binding, cut 12" bias strips with the rotary cutter. Attach bias to the edge of the reverse side of the quilt using a 1/4" seam.

Step 5 — Clean and prepare for display.



- Launder the quilt in the washing machine set to “cold” and if possible, “gentle.” Then toss it in the dryer, also set to “gentle” or “low.” On display, your stunning quilt will look both vintage and fresh.

This project first appeared in [CRAFT Volume 07](#), pages 152-153.

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